

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE SPECIAL EVENT POLICY

During the 63rd Annual IFEA Convention & Expo in 2018, our team learned that one of the greatest challenges facing government Event Offices is operating without an effective Special Event Policy. Community representatives often struggle to find the bandwidth to research and draft a new policy, and their Event Office staff don't have policy writing experience. With a new year comes the opportunity to tackle this project.

In this article, I'll provide some suggestions on what to include in your policy.

Do You Need a Policy?

If your community is operating without a Special Event Policy and you're unsure if you need one, consider the following benefits. A policy can:

- Help you make decisions more consistently and efficiently;
- Provide instruction to staff and other stakeholders on how to do tasks properly and safely;
- Build confidence and reduce bias in decision-making;
- Empower staff to make decisions without prior management approval; and
- Increase the accountability of the local government and its staff.

What Should be Included in a Policy?

Before you begin, check if your organization has guidelines on writing new policies which may include numbering, document structure, and required content. This will set the framework for what you must include in your policy. For example, most policies include a Purpose (why it is needed), Scope (who is impacted), Definitions (terms used in the policy), Responsibilities (who needs to follow and carry-out the policy), Procedures (the dos and don'ts of the policy), Authority (who can approve changes), and Attachments/Appendices (reference materials).

As you start to flush out your procedures, try to ensure the policies reflect the needs and desires of the community. You may want to consider engaging community stakeholders (other departments, Council, local business, and event producers) and refer to other strategic documents such as your Official Community Plan to ensure alignment.

To help you get started, here are some examples of the types of procedures to include in your policy.

Before an Event:

- Who is required to apply for a permit and when should they apply?
- Where is the Special Event Permit application form located online?
- What fees are associated with hosting an event?

- What is required for an event? For example, events may be required to:
 - Secure a location appropriate for the type of event;
 - Develop a detailed Site Plan, including accessibility for the differently-abled;
 - Develop a waste management plan that includes general waste, recycling and composting receptacles, zero waste initiatives, washroom and sanitary services, and post event clean-up initiatives;
 - Develop a traffic management plan that includes parking, vehicle barricades, road and sidewalk closures, police or traffic management services, drone use, signage, and fencing;
 - Develop a fire safety and emergency preparedness plan that identifies readiness drills, emergency exits and vehicle access points, first aid services, cooking facilities, hazardous activities (e.g. fireworks), etc.
 - Develop a technology plan for events that require wifi and other government managed technology;
 - Purchase liability insurance; and
 - Apply for additional municipal and inter-agency permits and licences including food & water permits, liquor licences, electrical permits, road closure permits, noise permits, signage permits, and business licences.
- What is the permit review and approval process? Who reviews the application and how long can it take to issue a permit? Can applicants access the status of their application online and upload additional documents? How long is the permit valid for?
- Are there best practices you want to communicate to event producers, e.g. how to produce a green event that minimizes the environmental impact? You may choose to include this information in a separate set of guidelines or as an addendum to the policy.

Also consider including specific procedures for the day of the event and post event. For example, what are your tear-down policies? What if there is damage to the site? Do you require each event to complete an event debrief or provide metrics to help your Event Office better support and fund special events?

6 Tips to Writing an Effective Policy

- As you draft your policy, remember to:
1. Keep your policy simple – less is more if you want people to follow your policy.
 2. Reflect your community's priorities, values and culture in your policy language and procedures.
 3. Ensure your policy is symbiotic with other policies and bylaws

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4. Make sure your policy is aligned with the mandate and goals of your Special Event Strategy. If you don't have a strategy, try to ensure your policy aligns with other local and regional strategic objectives, e.g. economic development.
5. Reach out to your peers in other organizations for their feedback.
6. Keep your policy up to date!

With an effective special events policy, your Event Office will be better equipped to support your departments' needs, align your needs with other stakeholders and ultimately provide event producers with a transparent and efficient permitting process.

If your Event Office is working on a new policy and you have questions or tips on what makes an effective Special Event Policy, please share by joining the conversation on Twitter and using the hashtag, #eventpermit.

Rene Michaely is the founder and chief visionary of eproval, a software platform designed to automate and streamline complex application and approval processes including event permits. Based in Vancouver, BC Canada, his team has an intimate understanding of government permitting and approval processes through their experience working with and for event offices. Rene has also been a product manager at an event registration startup and founder of a web development firm specializing in event websites and complex applications. You can reach Rene at rene@eproval.com, learn more about eproval at www.eproval.com, or follow @eproval.